

The 2012 Presidential Election and its Effects on Health Care

During each election cycle the candidates and political pundits alike tell us that this is the most important election in a generation, possibly even in our lifetimes. We are told that our children's and our grandchildren's futures depend upon how we vote. The 2012 Presidential election is gearing up to be no different.

Unlike in 2008, there is an incumbent running. Any re-election can be deemed as a referendum on the current administration and its policies. A related question we are often asked is whether the country is moving in the 'right or wrong direction'. Though President Bush was not on the ballot in 2008, his and the Republican platform was surely the primary target. While that election began as a referendum on Iraq and Afghanistan, focus shifted in the fall to the economic collapse. It is now time for the President to stand on his record.

Election Overview

President Obama is now held entirely accountable for the continued slow growth and jobless recovery. With the economy as the main campaign issue, some are likening it to Bill Clinton's campaign slogan 'It's the economy, stupid'. Within that context though, the role of government and its effect on the economy is the most important sub-topic. What is the role of government in our lives, the business community, the environment, etc? Are the unemployed and impoverished helped or hindered by government run programs? Important to MemorialCare Health System, of course, is the question of how the business community, in our case as providers, is affected by government programs that do not pay their fair share. Indeed, the question of the appropriate size of government is shaping up to be a core campaign talking point. All of the candidates, President Obama as the Democratic incumbent, as well as the 4 remaining Republicans, and one Libertarian are debating between smaller, less intrusive federal government vs. one which is larger and more proactive in our lives. Undoubtedly, this debate will continue until November 6, 2012.

As the campaign season moves from the retail politics of the Iowa caucuses into the important primary states of New Hampshire, South Carolina, Florida and onto 'Super Tuesday', the Republican field is quite split – in the days since the Iowa caucuses and the New Hampshire and South Carolina primaries there is no clear frontrunner. This is the first Republican nominating process since 1980 in which three different candidates have won the first three contests; On January 19, Senator Santorum was declared the winner of the January 4 Iowa caucus, Governor Romney decisively won New Hampshire and Speaker Gingrich won a come-from-behind victory in South Carolina. In fact, several of the candidates

have been leading the field at some point in time since the summer. One, Herman Cain, dropped out of the race as quickly as he rose. Newt Gingrich believes his less than stellar performance in Iowa is directly attributable to attack ads from Mitt Romney and the Super PACs supporting him (the former Speaker believes he was Romney-gated, as a passing reference to attack ads against Senator Kerry in 2004). Yet, Mr. Gingrich has surged from 4th and 5th place showings in the two early contests to win decisively in South Carolina on January 21. Each candidate, however, is focusing their health care talking points on one issue – repealing the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA). By all, it has been dubbed ObamaCare. By some, it has been dubbed ObamneyCare in reference to the Massachusetts plan signed into law by Presidential candidate former MA Governor Mitt Romney. All Republican candidates, as you read below, simply call for immediate and full repeal. Only a few offer any substantive alternatives and thoughts about sustaining the three-aims; higher quality, lower costs and better outcomes.

As with any campaign cycle, there are many unknowns. Will the stock market take another dive? We've seen a slight, almost undetectable downtick in the unemployment rate – will that continue and how will it affect the overall economy and the campaign? Some believe that we will experience slow, but steady economic growth in 2012. If that proves to be true, will Obama be able to capitalize on better indexes? If we see another downturn, will the president lose any of his current slow but steady momentum?

One of the most important 'unknowns' is whether a candidate is able to gain (or in the case of the president, re-gain) their base of supporters and 'get out the vote' on Election Day. In an election year filled with cynicism and apathy, this one issue will be critical and may hold the key. There are certainly many interesting points for Sunday morning talk shows. The most important question yet to be determined in regards to the engagement of the party's bases is, naturally, who will be the Republican candidate. There is an old political adage that states Democrats fall in love with their candidates and Republicans fall in line with theirs. Republicans are known to nominate their presidential candidates on a hierarchal system. The party generally chooses a nominee who has been 'through the ranks' and has run previously. This was true for John McCain in 2008, Bob Dole in 1976 and George H.W. Bush in 1988 (despite the fact that he was the sitting Vice President, he still endured a hard primary season). Even Ronald Reagan had to run in the primary season twice. Can Mitt Romney, the current frontrunner for the nomination sustain his polling status, or, will Rick Santorum, Newt Gingrich, Ron Paul or the others succeed in offering themselves as a viable alternative?

There are several *new* unknowns in this cycle. The Supreme Court has given 'personhood' to corporations and unions (the former having considerably more Super PAC money to spend than the latter); will these independent expenditures

affect the final results in a similar fashion to what we are seeing in early primary states?

Two of the unknowns are attributable to new political movements, diametrically opposed to each other, yet borne out of the same issues. The Tea Party Movement (TPM) had its start at the tail end of the Bush administration and gained strength in Obama's first year in office. It began with protests over the bailouts of the financial institutions and has developed an emphasis on lowering the national debt, reducing government and opposing any new taxation. It quickly grew in strength as the President brought health care reform to the forefront. The movement, now a major force within the Republican Party initially included Democrats and Independents tired of seeing the national deficit grow so exponentially. Members of the TPM were present at virtually all of the Congressional Town Hall meetings during the spring and summer of 2009 protesting the eventual health care reform bills. Their message was loud and clear – keep government out of my health care (amusingly, one of the most popular signs read 'Keep government out of my Medicare').

The TPM currently has 62 members of the House of Representatives (out of 435) and 4 in the 100-member Senate; all are Republicans. TP members have become a major force with the GOP; it is difficult for any legislation or public policy issue to move out of the Republican caucus without TP support. This was seen recently in the debate over payroll tax extension; the TP members did not want to extend the reduction for the two-month period accepted by the Senate. It was only at Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell's request that Speaker Boehner brought his caucus along. For the most part, TP members are less willing to compromise with Democrats or even other Republicans if the outcome does not lead directly to their stated goals. Many members have said that they are willing to lose the next election and maintain their integrity rather than compromise. Each of the Republican candidates is courting the TPM because they see, at least for the moment, that their endorsements can be golden. In fact, each one is trying to out-conservative the others and prove that they, and they alone carry core conservative credentials. With the growth of the TPM, many believe there is scant room in the Republican Party, at least during the nominating process, for a fiscal or social 'moderate'. To be determined in the long run of course is whether any one of these Republican candidates will create such a conservative administration. Also to be watched and studied, is how the eventual Republican nominee campaigns in the fall general election will. Can Romney maintain a strong right-of-center approach and gain enough support from Independents and conservative Dems (Reagan Democrats)?

The other new faction to be dealt with is the Occupy Wall Street Movement (OWS). This movement, still in its infancy is far less organized and directed and has yet to focus on candidates or political parties. Their message is strictly about the economic inequities between the wealthy and the not-wealthy. The OWS uses protests and sit-ins to bring attention to the differences between the

wealthiest 1% vs. the 99% of Americans .These protests began in September, 2011 in a park just off of Wall Street in downtown Manhattan and has spread to dozens of medium and large cities across the country, including Los Angeles and Long Beach. Attention is called to their interpretation of corporate greed and the perceived influence that corporations have on the overall economy.

Still unknown is the influence the TPM and OWS can have on the election. A recent poll indicated that 50% of Americans identify themselves with either movement. At the moment, it seems that the TPM has more staying power. Time will tell.

As with any set of data, polling numbers can, and indeed are, interpreted in many different ways, in order to best satisfy the needs of the recipient. In series of recent polls, President Obama loses to a generic Republican nominee between one and four percentage points, well within any margin of error. The President fares better against all specific candidates. In a series of non-partisan polls taken in mid-December, the president beats Governor Romney on an average between 1 to 8 points; beats Speaker Gingrich between 7 to 15 points; beats Congressman Paul between 5 to 13 points; and beats Senator Santorum between 10 and 14 points. *These figures have held steady following the January 21st South Carolina primary. Mr. Obama had also held commanding leads over Governors Perry and Huntsman and Congresswoman Bachmann before they dropped out of the race.*

From a historical perspective, what do these poll numbers really mean? Truth is, not that much. President Carter led Governor Reagan by double digits up until the final weekend of the 1980 campaign. It took a US Supreme Court decision to decide Bush vs. Gore. Governor Dewey celebrated his defeat over President Truman on election night, only to learn of his defeat the next day. And, while the Republican field seems to be dominated in early January by Governor Romney, Congressman Paul and Senator Santorum, 2008 early primary polls did not pick the eventual nominee. As that primary season began, NY Mayor Giuliani was 18 points ahead of Senator John McCain and Senator Hillary Clinton led Senator Obama by 30 points. This simply proves one thing – the only real poll that matters in on Election Day.

The Candidates

President Barack Obama (Democrat)

As one might expect, The President's entire health care policy revolves around implementation, and now defending the ACA. To recap, the ACA was signed into law on March 23, 2010 and represents the most sweeping changes to the health care industry (arguably, not the delivery system) since Medicare and Medicaid were enacted in 1965. The nearly \$1 trillion package is paid for by a variety of taxes, fees and offsets. The hospital industry is expected to contribute

\$155 billion in Medicare reimbursements over the ten year period beginning April, 2009. The impact on MemorialCare from this provision alone is expected to be \$158 million. Among the many components, the bill, which is phased in from September 2010 until January 2017 eliminates the denial of health coverage due to a preexisting condition, expands access to care through state Medicaid programs to over 30 million uninsured Americans and requires all individuals to carry health insurance coverage. Each one of these three major components is tremendously controversial; in fact, the fate of the latter piece, the individual mandate lies not only in the Republican Party's hope for repeal in the next Congress, but might actually be decided by the Supreme Court this term.

The Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) has announced an unprecedented week's worth of hearings in March to determine the constitutionality of the ACA in general, and the individual mandate in particular. To date, there have been six U.S District Court decisions on challenges brought forth against the ACA. Three of these challenges have upheld the constitutionality of the ACA; two struck down the mandate and severs it and the associated penalties from the balance of the bill. One suit questions the mandate in the context of a yet-to-be paid penalty, and whether the courts have jurisdiction over a future penalty. Appeals court decisions have also run the gamut; the DC and Sixth Circuit courts upheld the mandate, and the Fourth Circuit struck it down.

One hour of arguments will be held on the question of prematurity of any suit. Federal law generally prohibits lawsuits against taxes or penalties until such time that they have actually been paid. Two hours will be spent arguing the central question – did Congress overstep its authority by requiring citizens to purchase a particular commodity, in this case, health insurance. The White House is arguing that Congress used a 'quintessential' power in regulating interstate commerce. Two and one-half hours will be spent arguing the question of severability; can the rest of the law stand without the mandate in place (90 minutes). Industry experts believe that insurance companies cannot be expected to offer insurance to those with preexisting conditions if they are not allowed to share the risk purchasers of insurance who do not access such high levels of care. Finally, sixty minutes will be devoted to the question of whether the ACA went too far in coercing states to participate by threatening a cutoff to federal funds.

Opponents believe that the entire bill should fall if the mandate is ruled unconstitutional. The administration, obviously, believes that most of the bill can still function. A final decision is expected by SCOTUS the last week in June, just as it adjourns for this session. And, right in the middle of the presidential campaign.

Agree with it or not, the ACA is undeniably the president's premier domestic achievement. It was a major campaign promise and he began to address the issues of the uninsured and rising health care costs within his first few months in

office. Interestingly, then-Senator Obama campaigned against the individual mandate during his primary fight against Hillary Clinton. As the reader will see below, the mandate is at the crux of the Massachusetts health care reform program, signed into law by Mitt Romney. And, it was promulgated in the early 1990's by the Heritage Foundation, and supported by former Speaker Newt Gingrich, a position he now attempts to dismiss. In fact, the Heritage Foundation, a very conservative Republican –based think tank, had endorsed the concept of universal care during the 1990s Clinton led health care debate.

Since the mandate and the denial of coverage due to preexisting conditions do not take effect until January 1, 2014, the president can only best campaign on the threats to the health care delivery system if the ACA is struck down. Though unpopular within the business community, the provision allowing dependents to remain on parent's coverage until the age of 26 is very popular among the electorate. As it is with the question of preexisting conditions. It is difficult for the president to campaign on the great accomplishments of the bill; by and large, they don't exist.

Working to the president's advantage is a slight increase in public support for the ACA. In a mid-November, 2011 CNN telephone poll taken of 1,036 adult Americans (+- 3%) 52% favored the mandate. This represents an 8% increase since June of 2011. Those who oppose the mandate dropped from 54% to 47% in the same time period. Critically important to the president is the fact that 52% of independents now support the mandate. This block of voters will be critical to each candidate.

If the SCOTUS strikes down the ACA in its entirety, or only the mandate, it will be very difficult for the president to form and cultivate a new health care policy in time for the general election. Believing so strongly in the constitutionality of the ACA, the administration petitioned SCOTUS for an expedited review. In about 150 days, we'll know whether this was the right course of action.

Governor Mitt Romney (Republican)

This is Mitt Romney's second run for the presidency. As he ended his one term as Massachusetts governor in January, 2007, Romney almost immediately began organizing a national campaign for the 2008 Republican nomination. Though he came in second place in both Iowa and New Hampshire that year, he quickly began losing to Senator John McCain and withdrew from the race. Within the first year of the Obama administration, Romney began organizing his state by state operations for another run for the White House. Throughout the last year or so, Romney has remained at or near the top of the Republican pack. However, prior to the New Hampshire primary, he has yet to poll over 25% of the Republican electorate. As stated above, Romney fares better than any other candidate against Obama, but not yet over the top.

In similar fashion to the current administration, on April 12, 2006 Governor Romney signed into law the Massachusetts health reform law, which requires nearly all Massachusetts residents to buy health insurance coverage or face escalating tax penalties such as the loss of their personal income tax exemption. The bill also establishes means-tested state subsidies for people who do not have adequate employer insurance and who make below an income threshold, by using funds previously designated to compensate for the health costs of the uninsured. Not only do Democrats and industry insiders draw strong comparisons between the two plans, each of Romney's Republican rivals accuse him of supporting a law identical to the one he and the party wish to repeal. The Romney website clearly calls for the repeal of Obamacare. The governor has committed to signing an executive order on his first day in office that will 'pave the way for waivers from Obamacare in all 50 states'. He promises to call on Congress for a full repeal and to begin creating reforms that return power to the states. He plans to improve access to care by slowing health care increases and 'make health insurance portable and flexible for today's economy'.

As a major health care provider, we know the negative impact burdensome regulation can have on the business community. The Romney campaign promises to use limited federal regulation 'to correct common failures in insurance markets'. He does support the elimination of denial of coverage due to preexisting conditions. Important to the business community, he does agree that individuals and small business should be allowed to form purchasing pools as a way to lower insurance costs and to make more choices available.

All Republican candidates support medical liability reforms (one of MemorialCare's main advocacy points against the upcoming sequestered Medicare cuts). Romney proposes to cap non-economic damages in med-mal litigation. His proposal also includes providing 'innovation' grants to states for additional medical liability reforms.

Another cornerstone of the Republican platform is health savings accounts (HSAs). Romney promises to 'strengthen' these accounts as a way to encourage saving for health expenses and choosing cost effective insurance.

State responsibility and flexibility is promised under a Romney presidency. He believes that states, not the federal government are best suited to create programs that identify and address more localized issues. Block granting to Medicaid programs is a central theme. MemorialCare has long advocated against block granting if the reimbursements are calculated at lower than present rates.

Governor Romney proposes to expand the employer tax deduction to include individual purchasers of coverage. He promises that nothing that currently exists will change.

The question of commonality between the Massachusetts plan and that of ACA has been hounding the candidate throughout the early campaign season. This issue has been brought up by each of his rivals in every one of the 2011 debates and has continued onto the campaign trail. The harshest criticism has come from former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, particularly as the latter's poll numbers have been sinking. Ironically, Mr. Gingrich had earlier supported the plan. In an April 2006, Center for Health Transformation newsletter, Gingrich wrote "The health bill that Governor Romney signed into law this month has tremendous potential to effect major change in the American health system". His tone and rhetoric has changed as campaign rivals. During one of the October, 2011 debates, Gingrich said "Your plan essentially is one more big-government, bureaucratic, high-cost system". This is certainly an obstacle for the former Massachusetts governor, but not an insurmountable one. He simply shrugs the criticism off as political rhetoric. When asked directly, Romney has defended his support for the state plan while criticizing Obamacare by arguing that it is just that – a state plan, and not one that is transferrable to the nation. So far, the argument is working; Romney remains the guy to beat for the Republican nomination. However, as of early January, the most conservative elements of the Republican Party do not seem to be letting up and give in to a Romney candidacy.

Senator Rick Santorum (Republican)

Rick Santorum served in Pennsylvania delegation of the House of Representatives from 1991-1995 and in the U.S. Senate from 1995-2007. Considered one of the most conservative members of the Republican Party on both fiscal and social issues, Santorum has waged a typical grassroots campaign by courting voters at town hall meetings, precinct walking and small coffee club meetings. Though his polling numbers never reached above 15%, Santorum is experiencing a surge in early January with a very close second in Iowa and promising poll numbers in New Hampshire. He and Gingrich are beginning to battle over who is the true core conservative.

His record clearly is that of a strong conservative; stem cell research, abortions, marriage, Second Amendment issues, and foreign affairs to name a few. His history will also provide fodder to some Tea Party members who might otherwise be inclined to support him. During his Congressional career, Santorum strongly supported 'earmark legislation' bringing millions of federal dollars to his home state of Pennsylvania. Those earmarks, also known as pork funding served his constituents well, yet by definition, they add to the federal deficit. The TPM stands strongly against earmark fundings and is expected to question him on this part of his record. (Bringing this issue a bit local, MemorialCare has benefited from such funding as well.) In addition, Mr. Santorum supported the bill which created Medicare Part D, prescription drug coverage. The TPM views this as an extension of the greater entitlement, a central theme to their core principles.

Again, the Senator is expected to answer to the most conservative members of the Party as to why he supported this expansion of a government program.

As with his colleagues, Senator Santorum's basic health care policy is to repeal Obamacare. He believes that the ACA should be replaced with Patient-Centered Healthcare, not 'government bureaucracies'. He proposes 'targeted, market-driven, patient centered solutions to address the costs and underlying causes of being uninsured rather than a one-size fits all government-run health care system'.

To achieve this goal, the Senator promises to strengthen consumer options such as HSAs coupled with high deductible insurance plans. He wants to increase transparency through EHRs. In similar fashion to his opponents, Santorum promises to allow patients to purchase insurance across state lines, enact legislation reforming medical liability, and block grant Medicaid funding to states.

Beyond these generic goals, Senator Santorum has not offered details as to how he would accomplish any form of health care reform. As the campaign season progresses and the knives sharpen amongst the candidates, the Senator will be pressed for more details as to how he will accomplish all that he proposes.

Speaker Newt Gingrich (Republican)

The former Speaker of the House of Representatives is another GOP candidate who has held front runner status since last summer. His rise and fall in the polls mirrors that of former candidates Michelle Bachmann and Herman Cain. Mr. Gingrich was elected to the House representing Georgia's 6th Congressional District in 1979 and served until his mid-term resignation in January 1999; he served as the 58th Speaker from 1995-1999. The Speaker is portraying himself in this campaign as the only true conservative option to Mitt Romney. He has characterized the former Massachusetts Governor as being too liberal-moderate on both fiscal and social issues. As described above, Gingrich has been openly lambasting the governor for signing his state's health reform plan. Related to a more recent health related issues, Mr. Gingrich criticized House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan's 2011 proposal to reform Medicare. The plan, seen by many to be too radical, contained components that directly addressed the increased costs in the program. Gingrich dismissed the plan as "right-wing social engineering", and went as far as to call it political suicide. The plan won unanimous support in the House Republican caucus and was never brought up for a vote in the Democrat controlled Senate.

As expected, the cornerstone of his health care policy is to repeal and replace the ACA. Gingrich writes "We must repeal and replace the left's big government health bill with real solutions that will lower costs and improve health outcomes". He proposes to do so in almost exact fashion as each of the other Republican candidates. As his web site states, Newt's plan will save lives and save money.

Gingrich, as others, supports tax credits or the ability to deduct the value of health insurance as a means for consumers to save towards coverage. Purchasing insurance across state lines is also included, as is Medicaid block granting (please see above reference for a MemorialCare response to block grants).

Speaker Gingrich is known for his intellectualized, deliberate comments. He has blended his conservative thought with a true market based capitalist thought. He states: "The lesson of nearly four hundred years of entrepreneurial, technology and science-based free market capitalism is very clear. You should expect to get more choices of higher quality at falling prices... We need to bring these concepts into health and health care".

Gingrich's plan is the only one to directly address wellness and prevention issues. Though generic in its scope, he supports allowing for more flexibility for states, plans, employers, Medicare and Medicaid to design programs that incentivize and reward healthy habits. Naturally, he also supports extending HSAs throughout the delivery system, medical liability reform and better fraud detection.

As with the current administration, a Gingrich presidency would reward quality care 'by changing Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement models to take into account the quality of the care delivered and incentivizing beneficiaries to seek out facilities that deliver the best care at the lowest cost'. It sounds eerily familiar to Obama's VBP initiatives.

He also plans to invest heavily in medical research, reform the FDA and increase transparency through high tech.

On the surface, there does not seem to be any brand new ideas or concepts proposed by Mr. Gingrich. His web site offers more bullet points than his opponents, and that is probably due to his long-standing interest in health care. In the mid-2000's he often spoke along side then-Senator Hillary Clinton on behalf of HIT funding. He believes everyone should be able to obtain insurance either through the free market or state block grants; he stands firm against the individual and employer mandates.

As the campaign season truly heats up, Gingrich is intensifying his attacks against Romney, Santorum and Ron Paul. The Massachusetts plan as well as Obamacare is central targets in Mr. Gingrich's campaign strategy.

Congressman Ron Paul, M.D. (Republican)

Congressman Ron Paul has represented two repatriate Texas Congressional districts over the past 33 years. He first served in Congress, representing the

14th District from 1979-1985 and was re-elected to serve the 14th District in 1997. The Congressman earned his Doctorate of Medicine from Duke University School of Medicine in 1961 and held practice in obstetrics and gynecology, making him the first M.D. to stand as a viable (subject to anyone's personal interpretation) candidate for the presidency.

Mr. Paul has often changed his party affiliation from Republican to Libertarian and back again. The 2012 campaign is his second try for the office. His policies are mix of Republican conservatism and true libertarianism- smaller, limited government. He uses the same descriptive words as many others do to describe the current administration's approach to government in general and to health care in particular – federal bureaucracies, one-size fits all... In very typical libertarian fashion, he calls the mandates 'immoral' and believes that the answer to the nations' health care crisis lies in 'freedom – not force'.

On top of his list, of course, is to repeal the ACA, also calling it Obamacare. Beyond that, he offers very few details. In fact, his campaign material offers fewer details less than any other Republican candidate. As does his rivals, the Congressman supports interstate purchasing of health insurance, additional tax credit and deductions for medical expenses, extended HSAs, and reforming the FDA.

He goes a little further in his proposals by calling for payroll deductions for any worker who is the primary care giver for a spouse, parent or child with a terminal illness. This is not a mainstay in traditional Republican thought. His proposal includes exempting those with terminal illnesses from the employee portion of payroll taxes while they are suffering from the illness or are incurring significant medical costs.

When discussing health care issues, Congressman Paul uses his personal experience as a physician and tells stories of how he worked every day to earn the trust of his patients. He promises that as President, he will work to earn the trust of the American people "who deserve a government that does no harm to their health care".

Many elements of Mr. Paul's libertarian thought often puts him at odds with the GOP, particularly that of foreign policy. One element of his health care policy leans more Libertarian than Republican, yet is in line with the TPM is his opposition to Medicare Part D. He called the Prescription Drug program 'an unwarranted expansion of government's role in health care. He goes on to say that Part D stands as a reminder that the 'GOP sometimes can't resist the temptation of big government'. Also consistent with Libertarian thought, Congressman Paul authored legislation in 2009 that would have allowed consumers of health care and physicians to opt out of the use of EHRs. This thought process is not consistent with that of the GOP mainstream. As with the others, he is putting himself forth as the conservative option to Mitt Romney.

Governor Rick Perry (Republican)

(Though Governor Perry dropped out of the Presidential contest on January 19, it is likely he will remain on the national scene and hold potential influence on the nominating process. He has endorsed Speaker Gingrich)

Governor Perry served one year as Texas Lieutenant Governor, under then Governor George W. Bush, and was elected Governor in December, 2000. Mr. Perry has touted himself as the leading conservative in the race and the only candidate who can beat President Obama in the fall. As the others, he has been an outspoken critic of the ACA, and calls for its repeal.

Unlike his opponents, Perry stresses health care reform as a means to create new jobs and stabilize the safety net. He believes that the federal government can improve health care by stimulating job creation allowing more Americans to be covered by employer-based policies. This, he contends will also reduce the strain on Medicaid thereby saving taxpayer dollars.

Specifically, he proposes to raise the age of Medicare eligibility, alongside the gradual increase in the full retirement under Social Security. However, he has not specified the age to which eligibility should be raised. He supports means tested adjustment of Medicare benefits to be paid on a sliding scale. Consistent with current industry thought, he supports bundled premium support payments directly to the beneficiary or as a credit against the purchase of coverage. As with the others, he supports better fraud protection, and block granting. As a strong believer in state's rights, Perry supports a state's ability to choose to opt out of Medicare and have the flexibility to develop their own health care programs.

As to the latter point, Mr. Perry contends that the one-size-fits all approach of the current administration has failed. He wants to return more responsibility to the states – a reasonable approach from a sitting governor.

As governor, his record on health care issues has come under fire even before he entered the presidential race. In the last decade, Texas has become first in the nation with the highest proportion of uninsured. On the other end of the spectrum Texas has the lowest level of access to prenatal care. The Texas delivery system as is California's is plagued with massive cost-shifting due to lowered Medicaid reimbursements. In a September, 8, 2011 L.A Times article entitled "Texas Healthcare System Withering Under Gov. Perry", journalist Noam Levey wrote "working Texans increasingly have been priced out of private healthcare while the state's safety net has withered". When asked about this during any one of the Republican debates, he contends that the Texas safety does indeed provide care for those 'truly in need'.

Earlier in the campaign season, Perry was greatly criticized, particularly by Congresswoman Michelle Bachmann, for having signed legislation mandating

Texas girls receive the HPV vaccine. This vaccine is known to protect against certain strains of the human papiloma virus, a contributing factor to some forms of cervical cancer. Beyond Bachmann, this legislation was greatly criticized by some parents and social conservatives. This campaign battle of words began shortly after Perry announced his candidacy in August, 2011. He immediately rose to front runner status, but, like most, if not all the others, has slipped in polling and early voting. Governor Perry's health care proposals do not stand out from any of his rivals. We will know by mid March whether he has the staying power to continue to combat Mitt Romney.

Governor Jon Huntsman (Republican)

(Though Governor Huntsman dropped out of the Presidential contest on January 16, it is likely he will remain on the national scene and hold potential influence on the nominating process. He has endorsed Governor Romney)

Jon Huntsman served as the 16th Governor of Utah from 2005-2009, and then as the United States Ambassador to China from August 2009-April 2011. When asked why, as Republican he agreed to serve under a Democratic president, he simply said that service must rise above partisan politics. His choice to serve though, has brought him under considerable fire from his campaign rivals, particularly Mitt Romney. This far, Ambassador Huntsman has stayed above the fray and insisted that as a strong patriot, it was his duty to accept the appointment.

Strategically, Mr. Huntsman has offered himself to Republican primary voters as the best candidate to beat Obama in the fall. He has, by and large, ran a positive campaign with minimal negative ads. Those that he has run have been against Mitt Romney. Huntsman has touted himself as a strong Conservative, given his record on both fiscal and social issues. Tea Party members do not generally accept him as such and have not engaged with him as the Romney alternate that he is seeking.

Huntsman's health care policy is not only directed by the repeal of the ACA, but it is rather limited to that commitment. His campaign literature does not detail any proposals for addressing issues of the uninsured; rising premiums or any of the challenges MemorialCare faces today.

As governor running for reelection, he promised to overhaul the state's health system and lower the number of uninsured. He created a task force to 'consider' health reform changes and he supported a tax credit for individuals purchasing a policy on their own. He is on record supporting Congressman Ryan's Medicare overhaul into a premium support program calling it an 'honest attempt to save Medicare'. As with the others, Huntsman supports block granting while reducing federal funding.

There have been many political rumors that in the event Ambassador Huntsman does not win the nomination might wage a campaign as an independent. He has thus far disclaimed any desire to do so, but it continues to make for good political conjecture.

Gary Johnson (Libertarian)

The only announced Libertarian candidate for President, Gary Johnson served as New Mexico governor from 1995-2003. A life-long Republican, Johnson had announced his candidacy in the GOP, but having failed to gain any traction, and indeed not invited to participate in any Republican debates, he switched his party affiliation on December 28, 2011 and is now running as Libertarian. An interesting footnote, of course, is that Dr. Paul has switched his affiliation several times between Republican and Libertarian.

He has been known as a very conservative governor, particularly on fiscal issues. Following the Libertarian doctrine, he strongly supports limited government, rational drug policy reforms (antithetical to that of the GOP), protection of civil liberties and comprehensive tax reform. Believing that the current course of our entitlement programs will eventually bankrupt our nation, he proposes to revise the terms of Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security. He has not disclosed any mechanisms to do so.

On a lighter note, if Governor Johnson were to be a member of the MemorialCare system, he would undoubtedly be a great supporter and competitor in our Good Life programs. He is an avid skier, bicyclist and has scaled four of the highest peaks on all seven continents.

Currently, the Libertarian Party is the third largest and fastest growing party in America. Less than 225,000 Americans are registered as Libertarians in which states allow for party registration. No presidential candidate has ever received more than 1.1% of the vote in any national election since 1972.

Soon, It Will Be Our Turn to Speak

The primary season is now in full gear. The Iowa caucuses brought an end to Congresswoman Michelle Bachmann's campaign and energized Senator Rick Santorum's. Poor showings in early contests also ended Governors Perry and Huntsman's campaigns; following South Carolina, Mr. Gingrich is enjoying a third resurgence. Governor Romney's once-thought impenetrable campaign to the White House and his seemingly clear path towards the nomination is proving to be a tougher road than he had expected, and not one he relishes. No candidate has a clear path. There are all indications that none of his remaining rivals are ready to lay down their political swords and easily hand him the nomination. The personal jabs between Romney and Gingrich, and to some degree, Santorum, are intensifying; Gingrich is centering on Romney's tenure at Bain Capital and

Romney is reminding voters that Gingrich resigned as Speaker under an ethics investigation. In fact, many pundits believe this primary fight will continue for the next several months. The California primary is scheduled for June 5. With the California Republican Party's diminishing registration, there is no great hope that our state will bring any candidate over the top. But, as always, California is expected to serve as both parties' ATM machine for campaign donations. Following the important primaries in South Carolina, Florida (January 21 and 31, respectively) and the March 6 Super Tuesday, with 10 primaries and caucuses, we can expect regularly scheduled campaign stops from the president and each of the remaining Republicans.

MemorialCare Health System encourages each one of us to exercise our right to vote. We hope you will go beyond simply voting. As health care professionals, we have an obligation to serve our communities, our patients and their families to help create a delivery system that truly support those in need. MemorialCare's ABCs drive us to do so. MemorialCare encourages all of its employees, physician partners and members of governance to use their particular expertise and study the issues and candidates. Ask the tough questions and demand straight-forward answers. If you are registered to vote, be fully prepared on June 6. If you are not registered, or have moved since the last election, register now. You can find a registration form on the MemorialCare Government Relations we page (under Take action!).

The people we serve deserve nothing less.

For further information on the presidential election and its potential effect on MemorialCare Health System, please contact Peter Mackler at (714) 377-2946 or pmackler@memorialcare.org.